

Ephesians

How God Rescues Us

Lesson #4 for July 22, 2023

Scriptures: Ephesians 2:1-10; 5:6,14; Romans 5:17; 2 Timothy 1:7.

1. How does God rescue us?

[From the Bible study guide=BSG:] On October 14, 1987, eighteen-month-old Jessica McClure was playing in her aunt's backyard when she fell twenty-two feet into an abandoned well. Her plight attracted media from around the world to Midland, Texas. A global audience watched "Baby Jessica" sleeping, crying, singing, and calling out for her mother. They watched as emergency workers piped fresh air down the well.

Finally, fifty-eight hours after Jessica's fall, the worldwide audience watched as Jessica was released from the eight-inch well casing that had trapped her for more than two days. Photographer Scott Shaw's Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph captured the moment: a rescue cable bisects the worried faces of Jessica's rescuers looking down at the bandaged bundle at the heart of the drama, Baby Jessica.

There's nothing quite as gripping as a good rescue story, and Paul, in Ephesians 2:1–10, gives us an up-close-and-personal view of the grandest, most sweeping rescue mission of all time—God's efforts to redeem humanity. The drama of the story is heightened by knowing that we are not mere spectators of someone else's rescue but witnesses of our own.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath Afternoon, July 15.‡

2. This lesson will focus on what we can learn about God's rescue plan from Ephesians 2:1-10.

Ephesians 2:1-10: ¹ In the past you were spiritually dead because of your disobedience and sins. ²At that time you followed the world's evil way; you obeyed the ruler of the spiritual powers in space, the spirit who now controls the people who disobey God. ³Actually all of us were like them and lived according to our natural desires, doing whatever suited the wishes of our own bodies and minds. In our natural condition we, like everyone else, were destined to suffer God's anger.

⁴ But God's mercy is so abundant, and his love for us is so great, ⁵that while we were spiritually dead in our disobedience he brought us to life with Christ. It is by God's grace that you have been saved. ⁶In our union with Christ Jesus he raised us up with him to rule with him in the heavenly world. ⁷He did this to demonstrate for all time to come the extraordinary greatness of his grace in the love he showed us in Christ Jesus. ⁸⁻⁹For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it. ¹⁰God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do.—*American Bible Society. (1992). The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd

ed., Ephesians 2:1-10). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].‡ [We will re-read sections of this passage from Ephesians including from other versions of the Bible throughout this study.]‡

3. Ephesians 2:1-10 tell of the plan of salvation in three distinct parts: they are briefly summarized in Ephesians 2:5 as follows:

[BSG:] (1) “We were dead in our trespasses”; (2) God “made us alive together with Christ”; (3) “by [God’s] grace you have been saved” (*ESV*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, July 16.‡§

[BSG:] **This ... lesson emphasizes three major themes of Ephesians 2:1–10 that describe the dynamic process of personal salvation:**

1. **What is the meaning of dead in sin? What is the nature of sinful living?**
2. **What does it mean to be raised with Christ to new life in Him?**
3. **What does it mean to be saved by grace through faith?**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 52.††

4. **What does it mean to be *dead in sin*? What is the nature of *sinful living*?**

[BSG:] **While Paul, in Ephesians 1, highlights God’s overarching plan of salvation in Christ at the universal level, in chapter 2 the apostle explains in more detail the way God operates in our salvation at the individual level.** After humans left the Garden of Eden, they entered a condition that Paul calls “dead in trespasses and sins” (*Eph. 2:1*). **In this condition, humans are dead in their sins in the sense of being controlled by both internal forces (sinful tendencies) and external forces (the devil [*sic*] and the world). Humans in this condition cannot hope for a life with God; rather, they are “children of wrath” (*Eph. 2:3*). The only hope for us is to become resurrected, to ascend, and to be exalted with Christ (*Eph. 2:6, 7*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 52.†§**

Ephesians 2:1-3: [Reading again:] ¹ In the past you were spiritually dead because of your disobedience and sins. ²At that time you followed the world’s evil way; you obeyed the ruler of the spiritual powers in space, the spirit who now controls the people who disobey God. ³Actually all of us were like them and lived according to our natural desires, doing whatever suited the wishes of our own bodies and minds. In our natural condition we, like everyone else, were destined to suffer God’s anger.—*Good News Bible*.*‡

5. When reading passages like this one, let us never forget what the Bible teaches about *God’s wrath* or *God’s anger*. God’s wrath is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway and are running away from Him as fast as they can. Thus, God leaves them to reap the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choices. God still pursues them, however, He allows them the freedom to leave Him. (See the handout entitled: *God’s “Wrath” or “Anger” As Described in the Book of Judges and Other Books of the Bible* on www.Theox.org filed under “General Topics” in the “Teachers Guides” section of the website:

6. What does James say about our sinful tendencies?

James 1:14-15: ¹⁴But people are tempted when they are drawn away and trapped by their own evil desires. ¹⁵Then their evil desires conceive and give birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

Romans 6:23: For sin pays its wage—death; but God's free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

7. What does sin do to us? What happened to Adam and Eve after they sinned? Prior to that event, they looked forward excitedly to walking with their Creator in the cool of the evening. However, after their sin, they ran and tried to hide from Him when He called to them. Why? What had changed?

[From the writings of Ellen G. White=EGW:] But after his [Adam's] sin, he could no longer find joy in holiness, and he sought to hide from the presence of God. Such is still the condition of the unrenewed heart. It is not in harmony with God, and finds no joy in communion with Him. **The sinner** could not be happy in God's presence; he would shrink from the companionship of holy beings. Could he [an unrepentant sinner] be permitted to enter heaven, it would have no joy for him. The spirit of unselfish love that reigns there—every heart responding to the heart of Infinite Love—would touch no answering chord in his soul. His thoughts, his interests, his motives, would be alien to those that actuate the sinless dwellers there. **He [the sinner] would be a discordant note in the melody of heaven. Heaven would be to him a place of torture; he would long to be hidden from Him who is its light, and the center of its joy. It is no arbitrary decree on the part of God that excludes the wicked from heaven; they are shut out by their own unfitness for its companionship. The glory of God would be to them a consuming fire. They would welcome destruction, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them.**—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*^{*†} 17.2-18.0.^{†‡}

[EGW:] Could those whose lives have been spent in rebellion against God be suddenly transported to heaven and witness the high, the holy state of perfection that ever exists there,—every soul filled with love, every countenance beaming with joy, enrapturing music in melodious strains rising in honor of God and the Lamb, and ceaseless streams of light flowing upon the redeemed from the face of Him who sitteth upon the throne,—could those whose hearts are filled with hatred of God, of truth and holiness, mingle with the heavenly throng and join their songs of praise? Could they endure the glory of God and the Lamb? No, no; **years of probation were granted them, that they might form characters for heaven;** but they have never trained the mind to love purity; they have never learned the language of heaven, and now it is too late. **A life of rebellion against God**

has unfitted them for heaven. Its purity, holiness, and peace would be torture to them; the glory of God would be a consuming fire. They would long to flee from that holy place. They would welcome destruction, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them. The destiny of the wicked is fixed by their own choice. Their exclusion from heaven is voluntary with themselves, and just and merciful on the part of God.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 542.2.††

[EGW:] [At the final judgment scene which takes place at the third coming,] Satan sees that his voluntary rebellion has unfitted him for heaven. He has trained his powers to war against God; the purity, peace, and harmony of heaven would be to him supreme torture. His accusations against the mercy and justice of God are now silenced. The reproach which he has endeavored to cast upon Jehovah rests wholly upon himself. And now Satan bows down and confesses the justice of his sentence.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 670.2.††

8. It is clear that neither Satan nor any of the wicked would be happy to be taken to heaven. It would be supreme torture for them! How did this happen?
9. What are our chances for salvation as a result of our own efforts?
10. So, what does it mean to be “dead in trespasses and sins”?

[BSG:] First, “dead in trespasses and sins” points to a literal death. Sin is essentially antithetical to God and life. **To be in sin is to negate God and life. Paul emphasizes that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Being in sin and remaining in sin leads to death (see also 1 John 5:16)—literal death—a complete annihilation of the totality of the human being. Being in sin is being condemned to death; it is tantamount to being “dead.” This death does not refer only to the body; the human being who participates, and chooses to remain, in sin will be dead in his or her entirety, in all aspects, without any surviving elements.**

Second, “dead in trespasses and sins” is a spiritual and moral condition. To be “dead in trespasses and sins” is to be dead to God. For humans, to be “dead in trespasses and sins” does not mean they cannot perceive God’s love, justice, or call, or that they cannot recognize their own decadent state. To state otherwise would lead to the concept of predestination. But humans can, and do, perceive God’s revelation and call; for this reason, they are “without excuse” (*Rom. 1:19–21; see Rom. 2:1, 9–16, NASB*). **The problem arises when they perceive God’s call of grace but decide that all is well with them and that they will be better off if they go their own way, claiming they can change themselves and fix the world by themselves (Isa. 5:21, Rom. 1:21–23; see also Gen. 11:1–5). This warped thinking, however, sinks them deeper in the mire of sin (Rom. 1:24–32).**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 53-54.††§

11. So, how much is included in this sin condition?

[BSG:] In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul illustrates this lost condition with the trope of walking in “the course of this world” (*Eph. 2:2*), fulfilling the cravings, the lusts, the desires, and the thoughts of the flesh (*Eph. 2:3*). By doing so, the unrenewed reach the point wherein they “call evil good, and good evil” and substitute “darkness for light, and light for darkness” (*Isa. 5:20*). This state constitutes not only moral confusion but moral rebellion against God.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 54.†§

12. These sinful desires were all things that the Ephesians were doing as acts of worship in the temple of Artemis/Diana. **In ancient Ephesus the magnificent temple of Artemis/Diana was considered to be a holy place. Thus, even the fertility rituals involving all kinds of sexual immorality were thought to promote “religion.”**

Ephesians 2:1-3: ¹ You were dead through the trespasses and sins ² in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³ All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.—*New Revised Standard Version*.*

[BSG:] Third and consequently, “dead in trespasses and sins” points to our being utterly unable to overcome the gravitational pull of the black hole of sin. This inability is so because sin has become a pervasive controlling force in our beings, becoming “another law waging war” in and against us (*Rom. 7:23, ESV*). Our very nature was affected, diseased in an irremediable way, to the point of becoming a “body of death” (*Rom. 7:24, ESV*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 54.†§

13. After reading all of these statements, one might be totally depressed or discouraged.

14. How could such people ever be elevated by God to enter heaven? It should be obvious that this is an impossible order for us to accomplish on our own.

[BSG:] But we cannot resurrect, ascend, and exalt ourselves. For this reason, Paul emphasizes that we are saved “by grace” (*Eph. 2:5, 8*). It is totally God’s work, initiative, love, mercy, and power (*Eph. 2:4*). For Paul, this work is the foundation of the gospel. Yet, Paul immediately rushes to add that we are saved “through faith” (*Eph. 2:8*). **While our salvation is, in totality, God’s work, God does not save us against our wills.** Those who are saved will not ascend to heaven or be exalted to the heavenly places by a divine act of predestination. Rather, God’s salvation becomes operational in us when we exercise faith—that is, when we accept and receive God’s salvation, allowing God’s power to resurrect us, to exalt our lives, and to empower us to live in Christ Jesus.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 52.†§

Ephesians 2:4-5: ⁴ But God’s mercy is so abundant, and his love for us is so great, ⁵ that while we were spiritually dead in our disobedience he brought us to life with Christ. It is by God’s grace that you have been saved.—*Good News Bible*.*

[EGW:] It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one." "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Job 14:4; Romans 8:7. Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort, all have their proper sphere, but here they are powerless. They may produce an outward correctness of behavior, but they cannot change the heart; they cannot purify the springs of life. There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can be changed from sin to holiness. That power is Christ. His grace alone can quicken the lifeless faculties of the soul, and attract it to God, to holiness.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ** 18.1.†

[EGW:] It is not enough to perceive the loving-kindness of God, to see the benevolence, the fatherly tenderness, of His character. It is not enough to discern the wisdom and justice of His law, to see that it is founded upon the eternal principle of love. Paul the apostle saw all this when he exclaimed, "I consent unto the law that it is good." "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." But he added, in the bitterness of his soul-anguish and despair, "I am carnal, sold under sin." Romans 7:16, 12, 14. **He longed for the purity, the righteousness, to which in himself he was powerless to attain, and cried out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Romans 7:24, margin. Such is the cry that has gone up from burdened hearts in all lands and in all ages. To all, there is but one answer, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29.**—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ** 19.1.††

15. Paul reflected this same idea when he said as referenced above by Ellen White:

Romans 7:16,12,14: ¹⁶Since what I do is what I don't want to do, this shows that I agree that the Law is right....:

¹² So then, the Law itself is holy, and the commandment is holy, right, and good....

¹⁴ We know that the Law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.—*Good News Bible*.*

16. What power could possibly change someone in such a condition to lift him/her to live in God's presence?

[BSG:] **What does it mean to be raised with Christ to new life in Him?**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 52.††

[BSG:] The phrase "by nature children of wrath" points to another daunting reality, as well. While still bearers of the image of God, we have come to understand that there is something deeply awry in us. Living the Christian life, then, is not just a matter of conquering a bad habit or two or overcoming whatever "trespasses and sins" (*Eph. 2:1*) are currently threatening. We do not just contend with *sins* but with *sin*. We are bent toward rebellion against God and toward self-destruction. Humans, by default, are caught in a

pattern of self-destructive, sinful behavior, following the dictates of Satan (*Eph. 2:2*) and our own innate, sinful desires (*Eph. 2:3*). Believers once were “by nature the children of wrath.”—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, July 17.†§

Colossians 2:13: You were at one time spiritually dead because of your sins and because you were Gentiles without the Law. But God has now brought you to life with Christ. God forgave us all our sins.—*Good News Bible.**

Romans 5:17: It is true that through the sin of one man death began to rule because of that one man. But how much greater is the result of what was done by the one man, Jesus Christ! All who receive God’s abundant grace and are freely put right with him will rule in life through Christ.—*Good News Bible.**

Romans 6:23: [Reading again:] For sin pays its wage—death; but God’s free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.—*Good News Bible.*†*

Romans 7:23-24: ²³But I see a different law at work in my body—a law that fights against the law which my mind approves of. It makes me a prisoner to the law of sin which is at work in my body. ²⁴What an unhappy man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is taking me to death?—*Good News Bible.**

[BSG:] It is for this very reason that Paul notes that only a “resurrection” can save us from our being “dead in sins” (*Eph. 2:5, 6*). But Paul does not talk about a resurrection akin to the resurrection of the avian phoenix of ancient myth, a bird that had an intrinsic regenerative power. Our death in sin and because of sin is definitive and irreversible. We do not have in us any intrinsic power to revive. Only God, who created us, can re-create or resurrect us.

For Paul, resurrection is not a “simple” regeneration of our biological tissues so that we might live for several decades more in the same sinful condition. Rather, Paul’s notion of resurrection is a total escape from the damaging power of the world and from the domination of sin. Paul’s belief in resurrection constitutes another kind, or quality, of life—eternal life (*Rom. 6:23*). This unique power of renewal was manifested in Christ’s resurrection from the dead (*Eph. 1:20*) and then given to us in the sense that God invited us to share and partake, through the Spirit, in Christ’s resurrection (*Eph. 2:5, 6*).

In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul explains that because sin is such a pervasive force in us, it is inevitable that we die. **But because of God’s grace, we do not need to die *in sin*, but *to sin*.** Christ died in our place for our sin. Now, in Christ we die, but we die with Christ to sin (*Rom. 6:2–4*). Paul, then, concludes that, because “we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for the one who has died is freed from sin” (*Rom. 6:5–7, NASB*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 54-55.†§

[Emphasis designated by the italic type is added above in the phrase: “**we do not need to die *in sin*, but *to sin*.**”]‡

[What does it mean to say, “I die with Christ”? We know that the life and death of Jesus give us a choice: We can either live a life as close as possible to His life; or, we will die the death that He died, called *the second death*, separated from God by our sins!]‡

Ephesians 1:3: Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! For in our union with Christ **he has blessed us by giving us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world.**—*Good News Bible*.*†

Ephesians 3:10: ... In order that at the present time, by means of the church, the angelic rulers and powers in the heavenly world might learn of his wisdom in all its different forms.—*Good News Bible*.* [Remember that the great controversy did not start on this earth; it started in heaven with Lucifer and his angels “fighting” against loyal angels and Christ Himself!]‡

Ephesians 6:12: For we are not fighting against human beings but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age.—*Good News Bible*.*

17. ***What do these verses teach about the reality of the great controversy over God’s character and His form of government? What could angels, living in the very presence of God, learn about Him from us? For the first time they observed how God deals with rebellion! At the same time, how can we draw comfort and hope in the knowledge that Jesus has been victorious and that we can share in His victory now?***
18. **The great controversy is real. The angels already know how it is going to end, and we do also. It is the greatest war that has ever been fought. It involves the entire universe. We must never underestimate the skills of the Devil. By rising from the grave and coming forth in His immortal body, Jesus Christ has proven that God can do that; God can do the same even for repentant sinners!**

[BSG:] **What does it mean to be saved [healed] by grace through faith?**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 52.†‡

[BSG:] When Paul says that we are saved [healed] “by grace . . . through faith” (*Eph. 2:8*), he does not say we are saved [healed] only by grace or only by faith. The two always work together in salvation [or healing]. However, they do have an essential sequential order of operation. In the gospel, it is not faith that generates grace. Faith is not an inner energy of ours that gives us life and power, that elevates us to God, that changes God’s disposition toward us, or that generates salvation. Rather, for Paul faith occurs or is born and becomes operational in us when God offers us His grace (*Rom. 10:17*). **Grace generates faith. Faith is our reception of God’s grace manifested to us.**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 55.†‡§ [Faith means moving closer to God; sin means separating from God. (See Romans 14:23.)]‡

Romans 10:17: So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.—*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*.^{*} (1989). (Romans 10:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.[†]

[BSG:] This understanding has at least two major implications. **First**, faith is not, and cannot be, meritorious. In fact, even faith is a gift from God, because God offers us all the possibility of receiving His grace. Both grace and faith are the gifts of God (*Eph. 2:8*). For this reason, Paul emphasizes that our works do not have any role in producing our salvation (*Eph. 2:9*). Rather, we, as saved people, are God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (*Eph. 2:10, NASB*). These good works, therefore, are not ours; they are not generated by the genius or power of our faith; rather, they were "prepared [by God] beforehand so that we would walk in them" (*Eph. 2:10, NASB*).

Second, Paul joins justification with sanctification in an inextricable relation. While justification means we are clothed in Christ's righteousness, sanctification means we are clothed in Christ's robe of good works and are walking in it.

Third, grace and faith are the foundation of the unity of the church, which is one of the central themes of Paul's theology of the church. The church is united in the same experience of receiving the divine revelation of grace and in the same experience of accepting and embracing it in faith, "one faith" (*Eph. 4:5*). **In this experience, all church members are equal. Again, the church is not a multitiered society in which some members are better Christians because they received more grace. The church is not divided into camps of more spiritual or less spiritual members, according to the degree of their faith. Rather, the entire church is founded on, and united in, the same grace and the same acceptance of that grace in faith.** In Ephesians 4:7, Paul seems to talk about various degrees or types of grace. Here, though, he does not speak of salvific grace but about the diversity of the spiritual gifts for the edification of God's church and for the accomplishment of its mission. Also, when, in 1 Corinthians 12:9, Paul says that the Spirit gives faith to some, he refers to the same topic of the spiritual gifts and not to the salvific faith given to all humans.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*^{*} 55-56.^{††Ω§}

Ephesians 2:6-7: ⁶In our union with Christ Jesus he raised us up with him to rule with him in the heavenly world. ⁷He did this to demonstrate for all time to come the extraordinary greatness of his grace in the love he showed us in Christ Jesus.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

[BSG:] Believers are (1) co-resurrected with Christ; (2) co-raised up with Christ (which Paul probably uses to indicate the participation of believers in Christ's ascension to heaven); and (3) co-seated with Christ "in the heavenly places," meaning that believers participate in Christ's "seating" on the throne of the cosmos. **They are co-exalted with Jesus.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*^{*} for Tuesday, July 18.^{††}

[BSG:] While for some people the Christian God is a punitive and vengeful divinity, many contemporary people simply cannot associate a loving and gracious God with wrath, judgment, and condemnation. In Ephesians 2:3, Paul describes sinful people as “children of wrath,” which means that, if they remain in that condition, they will receive the wrath, or the condemnation, of God directed against sin (*Rom. 1:18*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 56.†§

19. Is it possible for us to explain the *wrath of God* to the following groups of people: (1) Our children? (2) Our non-Adventist neighbors? and (3) Our secular, atheist colleagues? and still make God look like the loving God that He is?

[BSG:] Many Seventh-day Adventists grew up in what we would call an insulated or “pure” Christian environment in which they were not exposed to many of the temptations of a more secular or worldly life. However, these Adventists are still dead in their sins all the same and have not experienced the new birth. What are ways that [we] . . . could help these fellow Adventists to experience the fullness of being “made . . . alive together with Christ” (*Eph. 2:5, ESV*)? That is, how can we encourage these Adventists to be reborn without first having to go through the entire misery of a sinful life?—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 56.†§

20. Have we grasped the essence of the plan of salvation as portrayed in Ephesians 2:1-10?

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